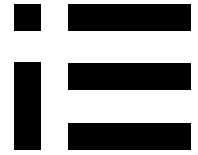


KALEIDASCOPIC DATA: Rethinking Inclusion Through a New Social Capital Lens

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The Problem

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) have become priorities for schools worldwide, as education systems increasingly recognise the importance of creating environments that meet the needs of all students and staff. Policies have been implemented to tackle discrimination and bias and to ensure that schools are inclusive 'safe' spaces. Yet, despite this progress, closing inclusion gaps remains a slow process. A key barrier to faster progress is the limitation of traditional school data.

Schools collect vast amounts of data on attendance, behaviour, academic performance, and demographics. These datasets are useful yet often fail to capture the complexity of individuals' lived experiences—particularly how intersectionality (the overlap of various aspects of identity) impacts student and staff inclusion. Traditional data metrics tend to reduce people to singular categories, such as SEND, ethnicity, their neurodiversity or socio-economic status. This oversimplification limits schools' ability to understand their communities' needs and to take targeted action to close inclusion gaps.

Recent data from the UK Department for Education (DfE) highlights this issue, particularly in how disadvantage is defined and measured. For example, the university entry gap between 'disadvantaged' students and their 'advantaged' peers in England reached its highest level in nearly two decades. However, the term 'disadvantage' remains broad and imprecise, failing to capture the nuances of identity and intersectionality within this group. As a result, these metrics are often unreliable and inconsistent when assessing both progress and outcomes.

In October 2024, 2.1 million children in England were registered for free school meals (FSM), representing 24.6% of the total pupil population. However, when we examine outcomes for these students, stark disparities emerge. Recent data shows that only 29% of FSM students progressed to university by age 19, compared to 50% of their more advantaged peers. But what does this really tell us? FSM registration is a narrow and limited measure of disadvantage. Families may choose not to apply for various reasons — from stigma and fluctuating eligibility to temporary changes in financial circumstances. As a result, FSM data provides only a partial and inconsistent snapshot of disadvantage, making it an unreliable metric for tracking long-term outcomes. Similarly, while there has been some progress in narrowing attainment gaps between identified ethnic groups, significant disparities persist. Many students face compounded barriers that one-dimensional data sets like FSM fail to capture. These gaps reveal a fundamental issue: schools continue to rely on static, surface-level metrics that fail to reflect the complexity of inclusion.

This narrow, fragmented approach to data collection has significant consequences for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) efforts. When data lacks nuance, the interventions that follow are generic and ineffective, leaving invisible barriers unaddressed.

To achieve meaningful change, I believe that schools must rethink how they collect, analyse, and use data. This belief has been the driving force behind my Issue 1 January 2025 doctoral research and professional practice over the

past six years. In response to this critical gap, I've developed a new concept — Kaleidoscopic Data — to humanise school data and make it more actionable for educational leaders. By shifting from static metrics to a more intersectional, layered approach, Kaleidoscopic Data enables schools to see the full picture of their communities, empowering them to drive intentional inclusion efforts that are rooted in lived experiences rather than incomplete statistics.

What Is Kaleidoscopic Data?

Kaleidoscopic Data is a new pioneering and research led, multi-dimensional approach to data collection that allows schools to capture the intersectional, nuanced experiences of their communities. It moves beyond simplistic demographic categories to reflect the complexity of identity—recognising that people's experiences are shaped by the interaction of factors like race, gender, SEND status, socio-economic background, and sexual orientation.



To understand Kaleidoscopic Data, think of a kaleidoscope. As you turn it, the arrangement of colours and shapes changes, revealing new and intricate patterns with each rotation. Similarly, Kaleidoscopic Data enables schools to view their communities from different perspectives, revealing hidden patterns of exclusion or support that would otherwise remain invisible. This approach captures:

- The intersectionality of identities (e.g., how race, gender, and SEND status interact to shape students' experiences).
- The lived experiences of individuals through qualitative insights.
- The relational dynamics within the school community by incorporating social capital measures.

For example, a school may know how many students are identified as SEND, but it may not understand how SEND experiences vary across different ethnic, gender, or socio-economic intersections. This lack of intersectional understanding limits the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at improving inclusion.

The Role of Social Capital in Inclusion

To enhance the effectiveness of Kaleidoscopic Data, schools should also apply a Social Capital Framework.

Social capital refers to the networks, trust, and shared values that exist within a community. In the context of education, it highlights the relational dynamics between students, staff, and families that influence inclusion efforts.

The Social Capital Framework breaks down these relationships into three types:

- Bonding Social Capital – Relationships within similar groups (e.g., SEND students supporting each other).
- Bridging Social Capital – Relationships that connect different groups (e.g., fostering dialogue between students from different backgrounds).

- Linking Social Capital – Relationships with institutions or leaders that have decision making power (e.g., students’ relationships with school leadership).

Incorporating this framework helps schools understand how inclusion is enacted through relationships. For me, linking social capital and the use of metrics is crucial to move from measuring to actioning change. For example, if a school struggles to engage certain families in EDI conversations, it may indicate a gap in linking social capital. Linking social capital focuses on navigating power dynamics within schools by building trust and reciprocity across different levels of the hierarchy. Strengthening relationships between students, staff, and leaders creates a more inclusive school culture, where diverse voices are heard and valued.

School leaders play a crucial role in cultivating external partnerships with local authorities, parents, and wider community organisations. These connections open new opportunities for underserved communities, providing access to resources and networks that can help address systemic barriers. By fostering linking social capital, schools can empower underrepresented groups, creating pathways to advocacy and promoting sustainable, community-driven inclusion efforts.

Why Do Schools Need Kaleidoscopic Data and Social Capital?

Without Kaleidoscopic Data, schools risk perpetuating exclusion by failing to understand the complex realities of their students and staff. Intersectionality matters, and unless schools account for the interplay of different identities, they will miss key insights that could improve inclusion efforts. For example:

- A school may track attendance data but fail to see how attendance issues disproportionately affect students with SEND and from low income backgrounds.
- A school may implement anti-racism policies but overlook how these intersect with gender or LGBTQ+ identities, resulting in challenge opportunities.

The combination of Kaleidoscopic Data and Social Capital enables schools to:

- Identify hidden patterns of exclusion that one dimensional data overlooks.
- Understand the role of relationships in fostering inclusion within the school community.
- Make more informed, targeted decisions that lead to meaningful change.

As I often say,

“Inclusion happens when we stop looking at people through a single lens and start seeing them in all their dimensions.”

Proposed Solutions: How Schools Can Implement Kaleidoscopic Data

To collect Kaleidoscopic Data effectively, school leaders need to rethink their data collection methods. Below are some practical steps:

Step 1: Reframe Data Questions Move beyond static demographic categories. Instead of asking, “What percentage of students are SEND?” ask, “How do SEND experiences vary across different intersections of identity?”

Step 2: Incorporate Qualitative Data Collect qualitative insights through anonymised surveys. This helps to humanise the data and capture the lived experiences of students and staff.

Step 3: Use Technology for Continuous Feedback Implement real-time feedback mechanisms to gather ongoing insights from staff, students, and leadership. The GEC Platform is an example of a tool that captures Kaleidoscopic Data by regularly collecting input from school communities.

Step 4: Foster Social Capital Create opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and shared understanding within the school community. Examples include peer mentoring, focus groups, and forums for discussing inclusion issues.

Key Takeaways for School Leaders

- Kaleidoscopic Data is a game-changer for schools seeking to improve EDI.
- It provides a multi-dimensional, intersectional lens for understanding the experiences of students and staff.
- When combined with a Social Capital Framework, it enhances schools' ability to create inclusive communities.
- Real-time, dynamic feedback tools ensure that schools stay responsive to their communities' evolving needs.

Conclusion: A New Era of Data-Driven Inclusion

Traditional data has its place, but it will never provide the complete picture schools need to achieve true inclusion. Kaleidoscopic Data fills this gap by capturing the nuances of identity and providing schools with the insights necessary to drive targeted action. As educators and leaders, we must recognise that intersectionality and relational dynamics shape every aspect of school life. By adopting Kaleidoscopic Data and integrating the Social Capital Framework, schools can achieve meaningful, sustainable inclusion.

"Inclusion happens when we stop looking at people through a single lens and start seeing them in all their dimensions."

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Disadvantaged pupils miss out as university entry gap hits record level in England

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